

## THESIS STATEMENTS IN LITERARY ANALYSIS PAPERS

**\*The thesis statement is one of the (if not *the*) most important parts of your paper—think of it as the foundation of a house—if your foundation is weak and poorly constructed, what do you think happens to the house?**

**\*The thesis statement is the announcement of your analytical argument that you intend to make and prove in the duration of your paper. It is a road map for the paper—it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.**

**\*It should be placed somewhere in the Introduction of your paper—Many like to put it as the last sentence(s) of their Intro which is fine.**

**\*Successful thesis statements provoke thought and should read beautifully.**

**\*Your thesis statement should include two parts: WHAT and WHY.**

**\*WHAT: What claim are you making about the text?**

**\*WHY: Why should we care? Why is your claim important? Your thesis should answer the “so what?” question.**

**\*A thesis statement is usually, but can be more than, one sentence long.**

## **Examples of Literary Thesis Statements:**

**\* “Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is a great American novel.”**

**\*What’s wrong with this thesis statement?**

**\*An opinion about the book, not an argument.**

**\* “In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.”**

**\*Better? How so? What is still missing?**

**\*Doesn’t answer the “so what?” question—what is the point of the contrast? What does the contrast signify?**

**\* “Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American ideals, one must leave ‘civilized’ society and go back to nature.”**

**\*Even better?**

**\*It presents an interpretation of a literary work based on an analysis of its content and answers the “so what” question.**

**\* “Edgar Allan Poe’s work was affected greatly by the current events of his life, covering his family life, his childhood, and his career; these events changed his style and subject of his works.”**

**\*What’s wrong with this thesis statement?**

**\*More questions than answers: which works will be explored? What current events? What childhood or career events? How did Poe’s style change and WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

**\* “There is a lot of symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*.”**

**\*Bad? Why?**

**\* “Hawthorne’s use of symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* falters and ultimately breaks down with the introduction of the character Pearl.”**

**\*Better? Why?**

**\* “The character of Ben in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* is a great [or important, or crucial, or unforgettable, etc.] character.”**

**\*What’s wrong with thesis?**

**\*This does not say enough to serve as the basis for an essay. Besides, each of these judgments is entirely a matter of personal opinion because none of them define the criteria by which the judgment is being made.**

**\* “Through Paul’s experience behind the lines, at a Russian prisoner of war camp, and especially under bombardment in the trenches, Erich Maria Remarque realistically shows how war dehumanizes a man.”**

**\*What can we anticipate that the author of this thesis will prove to us in the rest of the paper?**